THE FACE IN THE MIRROR

A DEVIN DARCK TALE

BY

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Dedicated to Allan Moore who created my favorite supernatural ass kicker John Constantine as well as Mike Flanagan who has helped bring atmosphere and psychology back to horror

Devlin Darck's eyes shot open and he quickly sat up in bed. He had been back at the La Rue Manor just before the demon, Demor, threw him through the towering front window in the grand living room of the Spanish style manor house. He'd felt himself being lifted up off the floor and roughly thrust backward, but then he was back here in bed in the tacky motel Damon and he currently were staying in. It had been just another nightmare, like all the others that plagued his nightly dreams.

He looked over at the other bed. Damon was fast asleep, hugging his pillow and happily snoring like a foghorn. His blanket was pulled back to reveal the protective tattoo that covered his naked back. His black boxer-covered backside and skinny hairy left leg hung off the side of the mattress.

"Well, at least you can sleep peacefully, Bro." Devlin said under his breath, feeling a bit jealous. He had not had a good night in years.

He rubbed his eyes and let out a hard sigh. It had been seven years since the angel, Vernon, had resurrected him and made him God's demon fighter on Earth, yet even after all this time he couldn't get away from the events of that horrible night. They stalked him, like a predator and colored his perception of the world. But how could it not? Now he knew the truth about Heaven, Hell, and humanity. He knew he was merely a pawn on a game board in a battle between father and son for the very souls of humanity. Life was truly beautiful and unless he became a sadist in a few years, and started to relish the idea of eternal pain and torture, he'd rather continue on this fucked up mission and purge his soul of the remnants of the demon that still polluted it.

He got up and grabbed the cold leftover taco he had in the bag from dinner last night. *Breakfast!* He thought unenthusiastically.

Damon liked his tacos with a bunch of spicy taco sauce on them, it helped kill the flavor. Devlin on the other hand preferred his plain, which was the way the fucker who invented them wanted people to eat them,

He partially unwrapped the taco and bit into it ravenously. Over the past several years he'd had cheap-assed tacos from hundreds of greasy fast food places all across the country and, amusingly, they all tasted exactly the same, right down to the greasy meat, cheapo cheese, tasteless beans, and stale taco shells. It always amazed him. But they were cheap and fast to eat and that was what was needed…Well, that and a nice piss flavored beer to wash it all down. Unfortunately, he was all out of beer, but that would be corrected soon.

After he finished his meal he reluctantly looked over at the closed white door that led the bathroom. Now he was going to have to brush his teeth and in order to do that he was going to have to face the mirror or to be more precise the reflection in the mirror. The thought of it gave him a chill.

This feeling wasn't caused by the fact that he would have to face his five o'clock shadow, blood shot eyes, or even his morning hair. No, that was for normal people with normal lives. In fact he would prefer that over what was awaiting him behind that door.

For him it was complicated and a cruel reminder of how his life has changed since La Rue Manor. For, you see, because of his connection to the angel Vernon, he had the questionable gift of seeing spirits and demons even if they were possessing a human body. Of course, the side effect was that he was also able to see the pollution left by his possession and self-exorcism at La Rue Manor. His reflection in any reflective object, anything from window glass, the shiny paint job of a car, or unfortunately the cheap-assed bathroom mirror in a scum ball roadside motel presented him with an unfiltered image of the current state of his soul. It was definitely something you wouldn't want to face after a night of self-medication with your dear friend Mr. Jack Daniels after a long session of kicking demon asses back to Hell.

Devlin sighed. For better or worse it was time to just go into that bathroom to, so to speak, rip off the bandage. He had to face his demon and get the day started. After all he was a big boy and big boys are fearless, at least that was what Ma used to say,

He got up off the mess of wrinkled sheets and mound of baby blue blankets, then strode over to the plain white door and grasped the flower patterned fake silver door knob. He let out another breath and exclaimed, "Fuck it."

Slowly he turned the door handle and reluctantly walked inside.

The interior of the bathroom was as expected. It had a standard white toilet and a matching white combination shower and bathtub. The shower curtain was plastic and baby blue, matching the stacks of baby blue bath and hand towels on the white painted shelf next to the white sink that held a couple matching blue bars of soap and sampler bottles of cheapo shampoo sitting on its edges.

Somewhat amusingly it seemed the management had a soft spot for paintings by Vincent Van Gogh. A cheap poster of one of Van Gogh's numerous sunflower paintings was hanging in a royally cheap gold painted wooden frame on the wall above "the throne." *Vincent must be turning in his grave.* Devlin thought, shaking his head.

And, of course, lastly, there it, or he, was looking back at him in the reflective mirrored glass that covered the institutional metal box that worked as a medicine cabinet. But, this time there was something odd in regard to the reflection, and that was saying a lot given the subject of his observation was a demon version of himself staring back at him.

The reflection was just staring at him blankly. The fucking thing wasn't copying his movements. It was completely still like a photograph. Then, the red-skinned demon with the glowing red eyes, pointed ears, and bull horns cocked its head and gave him a sadistic smile revealing its pointed, razor sharp, teeth. A gray lizard-like tongue slithered from its mouth sliding across the tips of the teeth cutting it and leaving a trail of blood dribbling over the teeth staining them pink.

Then it spoke in a deep, hushed, voice, "What's wrong, Devlin? Don't you like what you see?"

Devlin was stunned and speechless for a count of ten.

The reflection saw this and chuckled. It moved its head to the other side and its smile grew wider. "Look at you," it said. It clearly was enjoying his discomfort. "God's big bad demon fighter afraid of a mere reflection." The reflection's clawed, red skinned, hand came into view and it raised it up in front of its face and waggled it at Devlin. The fingers had long black nails that were pointed and about two inches long. "Your boss would be very disappointed with you. After all you are representing Heaven as well as Dad's so called masterpieces. "

Then the reflection shook its head and gave him a dramatically fake sad look. "Oh, but I forgot you're an expert at disappointing dads."

Then it was Devlin's turn to laugh at the reflection. "Is that the best that you can do?" Devlin raised his eyebrows and shook his head. "I expected better from you, Demor. But really after all I kicked your ass twice."

The reflection's eyes opened in surprise. "Demor? You think I'm Demor?" it asked before laughing hysterically. After calming down it looked at Devlin with a hard, serious expression. Its stare bore right into Devlin's eyes. It's stare bore right into his very soul. "You actually thought I was Demor? No, I'm not Demor. You and your pet angel destroyed Demor. He was completely eliminated when you threw him into the failing portal."

The reflection cocked its head again, as if looking at Devlin's expression. "Demor isn't making a comeback. There's nothing left of him to bring back, thanks to you."

"But you're made of the fragments of Demor that stayed with me after I self-exorcised him." Devlin pointed out.

"Not what you would actually call fragments, really, more a light dusting. Far from enough to create a demonic ghost, even if such a thing were possible. Sorry Devlin, no ghost here expect for the ghost within your own wounded mind. A ghost you created. But I'm not that

ghost. Sorry to disappoint you." The reflection gave him its amused expression once again. "Don't you get it, Devlin? I am you. I'm the darkness within your soul." The glowing red orbs that were its eyes bore into his. "I'm a reflection of your own corruption and deep down you know this is true."

It smiled and showed its razor sharp teeth. "Secretly you wanted to be possessed. You wanted to experience the power of a demon." The reflection shook its head and its lizard-like tongue lashed out at him through its teeth tinting them pink as a result of the action. "It is because of your permission, consciously or not that damned the paranormal crew and your dear Carol to their fate. It's all your fault. You know this because I know this."

Devlin started laughing and shook his head at the mirror. "Is that the best you can do? I'm actually disappointed. I thought my ID was better than that."

The red-skinned, horned image gave him a surprised look. "But you know…" It began but Devlin cut it off with a wave of his hand.

"Yeah, yeah, yeah. I'm a naughty boy and you know the truth…Blah, blah, blah. Rice pudding."

"But you know the truth." The image blasted back at him.

Devlin crossed his arms and cocked his head to the right. "Yeah, I do. Whatever. I also know this is a dream. I don't know how many times I've subjected myself to it but it must have been quite a few judging by the feeling of déjà vu I'm getting right now. What I do know is you are just my subconscious trying to force me to deal with my situation because I'm stuck having to see that disgusting face every time I see my refection."

"What you are seeing is the state of your soul and you know deep down you are wasting your time fighting this war in to cleanse it. Your soul is doomed and so are you. I'm proof of this. Nothing has changed." The image countered. "You can see it's true."

Devlin shook his head and sighed. "What I can see is I didn't get drunk enough last night. Remember, Chuckles, Vernon told me before I signed up for this gig that it would take a great amount of time for my soul to be cleansed."

"But you've thought there should be more progress by now. You don't see much progress at all. Don't bullshit me, human. You know I'm saying the truth." Then the reflection sneered. "And don't call me that name."

Devlin gave the reflection the grin he always gave demons when he managed to irritate them. "But I love Chuckles. It is so appropriate. It is so very much you." The reflection scowled and Devlin chuckled.

This infuriated the reflection. Its eyes flared with red energy. It showed its teeth and let out a roar of pure rage. "You will pay for this insult petty, weak, human! I will feast on your

failures and will laugh as anyone who allies to you die horribly. I will celebrate as you are defeated by the hordes of Hell and must face damnation to the torture pits. This war is already decided."

"Really, war? What war? This isn't a war. This is a school yard rumble…the bullies versus the kid who doesn't give a shit and doesn't sweat them."

"You talk a good battle, human, but in the end all you are is a mortal going up against immortal former angels who have spent millennia learning how to hurt you both physically and psychologically. You are completely out classed and because I know it you know it."

Devlin gave his evil refection a closed mouth grin. "What I know is I'm going to spend my free time contemplating the kick-assed party I'm going to have once I completely eradicate you from existence and send as many of Lucifer's demons I can stumbling back to Hell in disgrace."

"You dare even think you can achieve that against me and my lord, Satan." The demon image of Devlin glared at him.

"Yep, Chuckles." Devlin said as he turned and started to walk to the door of the bathroom. "Well, it's been a slice…"

"You can't walk away from me!" the reflection yelled at him angrily.

"Odd, isn't that exactly what I'm doing?" he said before opening the door.

In the waking world Devlin's eyes snapped open. Then the pain in his head and body began. It felt unusually wonderful to him. That annoying dream was over and he was back.

He was just starting to try to sit up when he heard, "Did you have the demon reflection dream again?" It was Carol and she standing behind him on the other side of the bed. Devlin was startled. His body screamed and he jumped slightly. His head felt like it wanted to explode. "You did that on purpose." He said through clenched teeth.

"Could you two get a room of your own?" Damon half mumbled groggily. "Some of us are trying to sleep."

Devlin had convinced Vernon to allow Damon to see and hear him and Carol as well as see demons in their true forms. It saved Devlin having to relay Vernon's instructions. Also, they could take advantage of Damon's skills as a mage.

"Vernon wants you both ready to leave in ten minutes." Carol informed them, rolling her eyes.

“Yeah, right.” Damon said, as he started getting up. But of course Damon was sober. He had a beer and drank sodas the rest of the evening. *Lucky bastard!* Devlin thought, but, of course, Damon had to be the good boy because he had to drive the van.

As for Devlin, he had been so hammered that Damon had had to undress him and put him in bed. Damon was such a good brother and Devlin didn’t forget that. He doubted he would have made it this long without his little brother.

“Tell that winged drill sergeant that we will be out when we are ready.” Devlin told her. “We are not going into battle in this condition.”

“Vernon won’t be pleased.” Carol reminded him.

“I could give a fuck.” Devlin told her before coughing up a wad of spittle and spitting it on the floor.

“I can see that.” She said with revulsion. Then she gave him a conspirator’s smile and leaned in. “So, did you have the dream? Did you call it Chuckles again? I find that cute as hell.”

Devlin had come to be aware that Carol and Damon had a bet going about how many times Devlin would have to endure the dream before his mind came to terms with it. “I really appreciate how you are so sensitive to my feelings.” He gave her a hard look. “Yeah, I did and I’m at two hundred and sixty-eight times. Are you winning, *Dear?*”

“We just want you to come to terms with your reflection.” She told him defensively. “You didn’t want what happened at the manor. That demon used your scientific curiosity against you. None of us, including the paranormal crew blame you.”

Devlin rubbed his temples. This wasn’t exactly a prime time to discuss this, but he guessed he was stuck doing it. “And what about you? It was because of me that you killed yourself.” Tears welled in his eyes, they always did. And she wondered why he tried to numb his feelings with booze.

She walked through the bed and stood in front of him with her head cocked. The rope burn from the noose evident on her neck. “For the hundredth time I don’t blame you. I was the one who mistakenly believed that demon would keep its word. That was my choice not yours. Stop putting the weight of the world on your shoulders. We all made our choices and we are all dealing with the outcome. We are in this all together. You need to remember that.” She lifted her hand to caress his cheek, but pulled back at the last moment because she realized all he would feel is the icy breeze of death. Carol gave him a sad look and faded away.

“And don’t you dare blame my participation on yourself, Bro.” Damon said, from behind him. “I volunteered and I have no regrets about my decision.”

Devlin heard the click of the lock on Damon’s suitcase. He was already getting dressed like a good soldier.

“Shit, Devlin, what would I be doing if you hadn’t given me this opportunity? I’d either be in some hole in the wall office doing Tarot for lovers or bored housewives or better yet doing card tricks and cheapo magic tricks at a dinner theatre three nights a week. Here I’m saving lives and making a difference. I’m using my magical knowledge and abilities for something better than cheap thrills and entertainment. I’m doing something worthy of my magic.” He pulled a cigarette out of his coat, put it in his mouth, and lit it with a flame that appeared on his finger tip. He took a pull and smiled. “I bless you every day.”

Devlin leaned forward a bit more and rubbed his head. At least the pain was starting to go down. He was definitely going to have morning hair. Oh well, a little hair grease and a go over with his trusty hairbrush would do wonders. And after he could take a photo on his phone to see the results because the whole demon reflection thing didn’t work with him in photos, thank God.

“But here you can get yourself killed.” Devlin pointed out.

“If I do, I die for a good cause rather than for a cheap trick. That means a lot to me, Bro. Don’t cheapen it by blaming yourself. You are my Bro. I love you. I’d die for you gladly.”

A cold chill went through Devlin. It did each time Damon made this speech.

Suddenly a bald headed face burst into Devlin’s vision. “I specified ten minutes, human.” Devlin had been so busy talking to Damon he hadn’t noticed Vernon appear in front of him. From the dagger-like stare he was giving, Devlin knew he was less than pleased. “Look at you.” Vernon said, even in his emotionless monotone his rage was apparent. “You are not even close to being ready.”

“I’m sorry, *Dad*, I’m trying to get myself together. It might take a few extra minutes to achieve. I wouldn’t go atomic if I were you, it causes wrinkles in that nice suit of yours.” He gestured to Vernon’s immaculate white suit and tie ensemble

Vernon’s jaw dropped. “You dare, human. I could smite you with a mere flick of my finger. Remember It is because you are trying to save your pathetic soul and those of those fools who played with forces your monkey mind can hardly understand much less harness we are here. But that is your problem. You are all so arrogant. It is amazing you have not eliminated yourselves. But time will tell.”

Devlin gave him an amused smile. “Well, isn’t it just so sad that you are stuck with me? Daddy, you know the big boss of you, ordered you to help me fight demons and cleanse my soul. I don’t think he would be particularly thrilled if you smut me, whatever that means?”

“Prey you never find out.” Vernon replied, giving Devlin a rare smile. “I would make your ending biblical. Lot’s wife’s fate would be mere child’s play, something thought up by the angel who killed all the firstborn of Egypt. Something for you to think about when you start talking back to me.”

“Well, it’s lucky for me you’re leashed and can’t harm me.” Devlin said, locking eyes with the angel. “As mentioned before, God’s orders. You need to realize that you are not in charge of me. You’re here to serve me. I call the shots and I say when we leave.”

Vernon’s eyes bore into his. The angel’s breathing quickened. Then it eased and his features melted into an expressionlessness mask. “I will wait outside next to your transport.”

“Oh, wait.” Devlin called, stopping him.

Vernon cocked his head, but was silent.

“What are we dealing with? What type of demon?”

An indication of a smile creased the angel’s lips. “Four demon monks. They are assassins sent by Lucifer to kill a rather annoying exorcist who has gotten too far in Hell’s way. Sounds familiar to me. The priest is currently hiding at a nearby monastery. The monks there have little hope of protecting him if the assassin demons arrive before we get there.”

“Understood. Sounds like fun. I’ll get out there as soon as possible.”

“Very well.” Vernon said before extending his wings and disappearing in a flash of golden energy.

“Life is beautiful.” Devlin said under his breath, shaking his head.

He grabbed up the paper bag on his bedside table. He was hungry and from what Vernon told him he would definitely need his strength. As expected he pulled out a wrapped taco. But also, to his great relief, he also pulled out a bottle of beer.

“The hair of the dog that bit you.” Damon said, as he slipped on his sunglasses and headed to the front door of the room carrying his suitcase with him since they weren’t coming back to the motel after this trip. They rarely did.

“Yep,” Devlin said, with amusement. “Breakfast of champions.” *And fucked up, homeless, demon fighters*…He thought.

Damon opened the door and light streamed into the room causing Devlin to flinch. It was most definitely going to be a sunglasses day. Men in Black comparison be damned.

Devlin looked over at the bathroom door. “Your next, Chuckles” he said, narrowing his eyes. “Welcome guest…” He said under his breath.